

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Effects of Cocaine on Bodies and Brains



<https://www.drugabuse.gov>

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Alcohol Facts

Drinks like beer, malt liquor, wine, and hard liquor contain alcohol. Alcohol is the ingredient that gets you drunk.

Hard liquor—such as whiskey, rum, or gin—has more alcohol in it than beer, malt liquor, or wine.

These drink sizes have about the same amount of alcohol in them:

- 1 ½ ounces of hard liquor
- 5 ounces of wine
- 8 ounces of malt liquor
- 12 ounces of beer

Being drunk can make a person feel very silly, angry, or sad for no reason. It can make it hard to walk in a straight line, talk clearly, or drive.

Some slang names for alcohol are:

- Booze
- Juice
- Hooch
- Sauce
- Rotgut

Signs of Alcohol Abuse and Addiction



People who drink too much alcohol might forget things that happened when they were drunk. This is called a blackout.

People drunk on alcohol often:

- Laugh and talk loudly
- Feel dizzy
- Have blurry vision
- Have trouble staying on their feet and sway when they walk
- Slur words when they talk
- Feel sleepy and relaxed
- Pass out
- Throw up
- Fight and even get violent

Getting drunk can lead you to do or say things that you regret later on. It also makes you more likely to have an accident and get hurt.

After drinking a lot, people get a headache and feel sick. This is called a hangover.

People who are addicted to alcohol start having to drink more and more to get drunk. They might have a drink in the morning to calm down or stop a hangover. They might drink alone, and they might keep it a secret.

They might forget things that happened when they were drunk. This is called a blackout.

People who are trying to quit drinking might:

- Feel nervous and sad
- Shake
- Sweat
- Have trouble sleeping

They will feel a very strong need to drink alcohol.

Effects of Alcohol on Bodies and Brains



Being drunk makes you more likely to get hurt or killed. Alcohol is involved in many deadly car crashes.

These are just some of the problems alcohol can cause:

Alcohol Poisoning

You can die from drinking a lot of alcohol at one time.

Diseases

Heavy drinking over the years can raise your risk for stroke (brain injury from a blood clot), cancer, liver disease, and other illnesses. People can forget to use condoms when they're drunk, have unsafe sex, and get HIV/AIDS and hepatitis (a liver disease).

Hurts the Baby

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it can cause intellectual disability and other health problems in the baby.

You Can Get Hurt or Killed

Being drunk makes you more likely to get hurt or killed. Alcohol is involved in:

- 60% of fatal burns, drownings, and murders
- 50% of severe injuries and sexual attacks
- 40% of fatal driving crashes, falls, and suicides

Brain Damage

Long-term alcohol abuse can permanently hurt your brain cells. This can make it hard to walk, remember, or learn new things.

Addiction

You can get addicted to alcohol just like other drugs. Fortunately, there are medicines and other treatments that can help someone recover from alcohol

addiction.

Cigarette and Tobacco Facts

Tobacco leaves can be shredded and smoked in cigarettes, cigars, and pipes. They can also be ground up into a brown powder called snuff. The shredded leaves and snuff can be chewed or held in the mouth between the cheek and the gums. The snuff also can be sniffed up the nose.

It might surprise you to learn that cigarettes and other forms of tobacco are drugs. It's legal to use tobacco once you're 18 or 19 years old, depending on where you live. But it's not healthy for you at any age.

Tobacco contains nicotine, a substance that excites the parts of the brain that make you feel good. You can get addicted to nicotine just like other drugs.

When you use tobacco, the nicotine quickly gives you a mild rush of pleasure and energy. But it soon wears off, which makes you want to use it some more. Sometimes, the rush of energy that comes with nicotine can make you nervous and edgy.

Some slang names for cigarettes are:

- Smokes
- Cancer sticks
- Coffin nails

Some slang names for chewing tobacco and snuff are:

- Chew
- Wad
- Dip

Learn About Electronic Cigarettes

Read NIDA's [DrugFacts: Electronic Cigarettes \(e-Cigarettes\)](#) for information about electronic cigarettes, including how safe they are compared to tobacco cigarettes.

Signs of Cigarette and Tobacco Use and Addiction



Tobacco smokers might get a cough that won't go away.
Using tobacco raises your blood pressure and heart rate. It also makes you breathe faster.

Using tobacco can make you not want to eat.

Tobacco smokers might get a cough that won't go away.

A cigarette smoker's hair, clothes, and breath will usually smell like cigarettes.

People who chew tobacco tend to spit a lot.

People often sneeze when they inhale snuff.

Because tobacco's effects wear off quickly, people often crave tobacco throughout the day. When people quit, they often feel a strong need to use tobacco within a few hours.

Effects of Cigarettes and Tobacco on Bodies and Brains



If a pregnant woman uses tobacco, her baby might be born too early or too small. This can cause health problems for the baby.

These are just some of the problems cigarettes and tobacco can cause:

Lung Diseases

Cigarette smoke causes lung cancer and painful breathing diseases like emphysema. These diseases can happen to people who smoke, or to others

around them who breathe in their smoke.

Bad Breath, Bad Teeth, Mouth Cancer

Cigarettes and other kinds of tobacco stain teeth and cause bad breath. Chewing tobacco can make teeth fall out and lead to cancer of the mouth.

Heart and Blood Problems

If you smoke, you are more likely to have a heart attack or stroke (sometimes called a “brain attack.”).

Hurts Babies

If a pregnant woman uses tobacco, her baby might be born too early or too small. This can cause health problems for the baby.

More Diseases

Using cigarettes or other kinds of tobacco can lead to heart disease and many kinds of cancer.

Addiction

The nicotine in tobacco is what makes you addicted. When you smoke the effects wear off quickly. This makes you want to keep using tobacco again and again throughout the day. The more you do this, the more your body and brain get addicted to the nicotine. Fortunately, there are medicines, other treatments, and hotlines that can help people quit tobacco.

Cocaine (Coke, Crack) Facts

Cocaine is a white powder. It can be snorted up the nose or mixed with water and injected with a needle. Cocaine can also be made into small white rocks, called crack. It's called crack because when the rocks are heated, they make a cracking sound. Crack is smoked in a small glass pipe.

Cocaine can make a person feel full of energy, but also restless, scared, or angry.

Some slang names for cocaine are:

- Coke
- Coca
- Snow
- Flake
- Blow

Signs of Cocaine Use and Addiction



After the "high" of the cocaine wears off, you can "crash" and feel tired and sad for days. You also get a strong craving to take the drug again to try to feel better. Cocaine speeds up your whole body. Your heart beats fast. You talk, move, and think fast. Your body feels too hot. You might shake and twitch. You don't sleep or eat much.

Cocaine can make you feel happy and excited. But then your mood can change. You can become angry, nervous, and afraid that someone's out to get you. You might do things that make no sense.

After the "high" of the cocaine wears off, you can "crash" and feel tired and sad for days. You also get a strong craving to take the drug again to try to feel better.

A person who snorts cocaine through the nose can get nosebleeds. He can even lose his sense of smell. His nose may be runny all the time, like he always has a cold.

A person who injects (shoots up) cocaine will have marks where the needle went in, usually on his arms.

People addicted to cocaine might take bigger doses or take it more often to get high. A cocaine high usually doesn't last very long. So people take it again and again to try to keep feeling good.

People who are trying to quit taking cocaine might:

- Act nervous and restless
- Feel very sad and tired
- Have bad dreams
- Be suspicious of people and things around them

They will feel a strong need to take the drug.

Effects of Cocaine on Bodies and Brains

These are just some of the problems cocaine can cause:

You Feel Sick

Cocaine can cause stomach pain and headaches. It can make you shake, throw up, or pass out.

No Appetite

Cocaine can make you not want to eat. Over time, you might lose a lot of weight and get sick.

Heart Attack and Stroke

Cocaine raises your blood pressure and makes your heart beat faster. This can hurt your heart. It can give you a heart attack or stroke (brain injury from a blood clot). Some people die because of it.

HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis

People who inject (shoot up) cocaine can get HIV/AIDS and hepatitis (a liver disease) if they share used needles. People also get these diseases by having unsafe sex. They may forget to use condoms because they're high on the drug.

Addiction

It is easy to lose control over cocaine use and become addicted. Then, even if you get treatment, it can be hard to stay off the drug. People who stopped using cocaine can still feel strong cravings for the drug, sometimes even years later.

Marijuana (Weed, Pot) Facts

Marijuana is a green, brown, or gray mix of dried, crumbled leaves from the marijuana plant.

Marijuana can be rolled up and smoked like a cigarette (called a joint) or a cigar (called a blunt). Marijuana can also be smoked in a pipe. Sometimes people mix it in food and eat it.

Marijuana can make you feel silly, relaxed, sleepy, and happy—or nervous and scared. It may change your senses of sight, hearing, and touch. Marijuana can make it hard to think clearly.

Some slang names for marijuana are:

- Weed
- Pot
- Grass
- Herb
- Boom

Signs of Heroin Use and Addiction



People who are trying to quit taking heroin might have pain in muscles and bones, get chills, and throw up.

Heroin gives you a feeling of well-being and happiness. It also makes you feel like the world has slowed down. People on heroin think slowly and might move slowly.

Heroin makes people feel sleepy, like they're in a dream.

Heroin makes the pupils (the black circle in the center of each eye) get very small.

A person who injects (shoots up) heroin will have marks on the skin where the needle went in.

Heroin is very addictive because it is usually injected or smoked, which sends it to the brain very quickly. People who get addicted to heroin need to take more and more of it to get the same high.

People who are trying to quit taking heroin might:

- Have pain in muscles and bones
- Get chills
- Throw up
- Be unable to sleep
- Feel nervous

They will feel a very strong need to take the drug.

Effects of Heroin on Bodies and Brains



Heroin can make you throw up

These are just some of the problems heroin can cause:

Sick and Itchy

Heroin can make you throw up and feel very itchy.

You Stop Breathing

Heroin can slow or stop your breathing. It can kill you.

HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis

Sharing used needles to inject (shoot up) heroin can give you HIV/AIDS and hepatitis (a liver disease).

Overdose

People overdose on heroin because they can't tell how strong it is until they take it. Signs of a heroin overdose are slow breathing, blue lips and fingernails, cold clammy skin, and shaking. You can die from a heroin overdose. People who might be overdosing should be taken to the emergency room immediately.

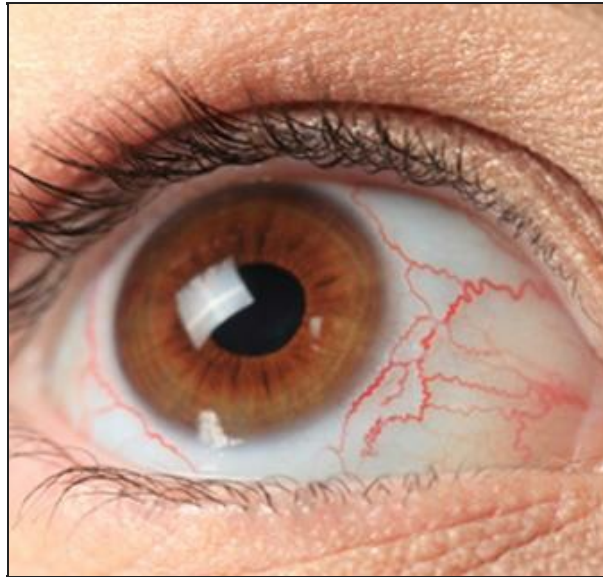
Coma

Heroin can put you in a coma. That's when nothing can wake you up, and you may die.

Addiction

It is very easy to become addicted to heroin. Then, even if you get treatment, it's hard to stay away from the drug. People who stopped using heroin can still feel strong cravings for the drug, sometimes years later. Fortunately, there are medicines that can help someone recover from heroin addiction.

Signs of Marijuana Use and Addiction



Someone smoking marijuana can have red, bloodshot eyes
Someone taking marijuana can:

- Get dizzy
- Laugh for no reason
- Have red, bloodshot eyes
- Forget things that just happened

Marijuana makes you feel like time is slowing down. Minutes can feel like hours. At the same time, everyday sights, sounds, and tastes may seem really interesting or funny.

Marijuana can make you feel very hungry. You want to eat lots of junk food. Some people call this "the munchies."

When someone smokes marijuana, they often smell like it afterwards. Marijuana smells sweeter than cigarette smoke. A person might use incense, cologne, or perfume to hide the smell.

Some people get addicted to marijuana after using it a lot. They might need to smoke more and more of it to get the same high.

People who are trying to quit using marijuana can:

- Be in a bad mood
- Feel nervous
- Have trouble sleeping

They will feel a strong need to take the drug.

Effects of Marijuana on Brains and Bodies



Marijuana smoke can hurt your lungs and cause some of the same coughing and breathing problems faced by cigarette smokers.

These are just some of the problems marijuana can cause:

Memory Problems

Marijuana makes it hard to remember things that just happened a few minutes ago. That makes it hard to learn in school or to pay attention to your job. A recent study showed that if you begin regular marijuana use as a teen, you can lose an average of 8 IQ points, and do not get them back, even if you stop using

the drug.

Heart Problems

Using marijuana makes the heart beat fast and raises your risk of having a heart attack.

Coughing and Breathing Problems

Marijuana smokers can get some of the same coughing and breathing problems as cigarette smokers. Marijuana smoke can hurt your lungs.

Drugged Driving

Driving when you're high on marijuana is dangerous, just like driving drunk. Your reactions to traffic signs and sounds are slow. It's hard to pay attention to the road. And it's even worse when you're high on marijuana and alcohol at the same time.

You Stop Caring

Over time, marijuana users can get "burnt out." They don't think about much or do much. They can't concentrate. They don't seem to care about anything.

Addiction

Although some people don't know it, you can get addicted to marijuana after using it for a while. This is more likely to happen to people who use marijuana every day, or who started using it when they were teenagers.

Meth (Crank, Ice) Facts

Methamphetamine—meth for short—is a white, bitter powder. Sometimes it's made into a white pill or a clear or white shiny rock (called a crystal).

Meth powder can be eaten or snorted up the nose. It can also be mixed with liquid and injected into your body with a needle. Crystal meth is smoked in a small glass pipe.

Meth at first causes a rush of good feelings, but then users feel edgy, overly excited, angry, or afraid. Their thoughts and actions go really fast. They might feel too hot.

Some slang names for meth are:

- Crank
- Ice
- Crystal
- Glass
- Chalk

Signs of Meth Use and Addiction



Meth can make a person's mood change quickly. For example, someone using meth might become angry and violent.

Meth speeds up breathing and raises blood pressure.

Meth can make people hyperactive (full of too much energy). They might talk and move around a lot. They might not stop to eat or sleep.

Meth users often scratch their skin, causing sores. They might have burns on their lips or fingers from holding a hot meth pipe.

Meth can make a person's mood change quickly. For example, he might feel excited, and then become angry and violent. He might feel afraid that someone's out to get him. He might want to kill himself.

People who get addicted to meth start needing to take more of it to get the same high. People who usually eat or snort meth might start to smoke or inject it (shoot up) to get a stronger, quicker high.

People who are trying to quit taking meth might:

- Feel sad
- Get really tired but have trouble sleeping
- Feel angry or nervous
- Be unable to feel happy

They will feel a very strong need to take the drug.

Effects of Meth on Bodies and Brains



People who use meth start looking old. Their skin often looks dull and has sores that don't heal. The picture on the left shows a woman before she started using meth. The picture on the right shows her two and a half years after she began using the drug. (Photo provided by the Multnomah County, Oregon, Sheriff's Office)

These are just some of the problems meth can cause:

You Overheat

Meth can make your body temperature so hot that you pass out. Sometimes this can kill you.

Crank Bugs

Meth can make you feel like bugs are crawling on or under your skin. It makes you scratch a lot. Scratching causes sores on your face and arms.

Meth Mouth

Meth users' teeth become broken, stained, and rotten. Meth users often drink lots of sweet things, grind their teeth, and have dry mouth. This is called "meth mouth."

You Look Old

People who use meth start looking old. Meth users burn a lot of energy and don't eat well. This can make them lose weight and look sick. Their hands or body might shake. Their skin looks dull and has sores and pimples that don't heal. Their mouth looks sunken as the teeth go bad.

HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis

People who inject (shoot up) meth can get HIV/AIDS or hepatitis (a liver disease) if they share used needles. People also get these diseases by having unsafe sex. They often forget to use condoms because they're high on the drug.

Addiction

Meth use can quickly lead to addiction and hurt different parts of your brain. It can cause thinking and emotional problems that don't go away or that come back again even after you quit using the drug. For instance, you might feel, hear, or see things that aren't there. You might think that people are out to get you, or start believing strange ideas that can't really be true.

Pain Medicine (Oxy, Vike) Facts

Pain medicines relieve pain from surgery or injuries. You need a doctor's note (called a prescription) to buy some strong kinds of these medicines. Prescription pain medicines are legal and helpful to use when a doctor orders them to treat your medical problem.

But people sometimes take these without a doctor's prescription to get high or to try to treat themselves or their friends. Drug dealers sell these pills just like they sell heroin or cocaine. Some people borrow or steal these pills from other people.

Some people think that prescription pain medicines are safer to abuse than "street" drugs because they are medicines. Prescription pain medicine abuse can be as dangerous as heroin or cocaine abuse.

Oxycodone is one pain medicine that people often abuse. Sometimes it goes by the brand names OxyContin® or Percocet®. Another one that is often abused is hydrocodone. One of its brand names is Vicodin®.

Pain medicines are usually white, round, or oval pills. They can be taken whole, smoked, or crushed into a powder which is snorted or injected.

Like heroin, pain pills can cause a rush of good feeling when they're first taken, but they can also make you want to throw up. They can make you very sleepy. And you can get addicted to them.

Some slang names for oxycodone are:

- Oxy
- Cotton
- Percs

Some slang names for hydrocodone are:

- Vikes
- Vikings

Signs of Pain Medicine Abuse and Addiction



People who get addicted to pain medicines need to take more and more of the drug to get the same high. They might try to visit different pharmacies (prescription drug sellers) so no one realizes that just one person is buying all these pain pills.

Pain medicine abuse can make you throw up.

Pain medicine abuse makes the pupils (the black circle in the center of each eye) get very small.

Pain medicine abuse can cause constipation (trouble having a bowel movement).

When people smoke, snort, or inject pain medicines, they get a stronger reaction than they would if they swallowed the pills. The high might be stronger, but it's even more dangerous and can cause problems breathing.

People who get addicted to pain medicine need to take more and more of the drug to get the same high.

People who are addicted to pain medicine might secretly visit many different doctors to get as many painkiller prescriptions as they can. Then they might visit different pharmacies (prescription drug sellers) so no one realizes that just one person is buying all these pain pills. This is called "doctor shopping" and it is not safe.

People who are trying to stop abusing pain medicine might:

- Have pain in muscles and bones
- Get chills
- Throw up
- Have diarrhea ("the runs")
- Feel nervous, angry, or very sad
- Be unable to sleep

They will feel a very strong need to take the drug.

Effects of Pain Medicine Abuse on Bodies and Brains



Pain medicine abuse can put you in a coma. That's when nothing can wake you up.

These are just some of the problems pain medicine abuse can cause:

You Stop Breathing

Pain medicine abuse can slow down or even stop your breathing.

Coma

Pain medicine abuse can put you in a coma. That's when nothing can wake you up.

Addiction

Prescription pain medicines can be as addictive as heroin—especially if they are smoked or injected. Then, even if you get treatment, it's hard to stay away from the drug. Fortunately, there are medicines that can help someone recover from prescription pain medicine addiction.

Overdose

Signs of a pain medicine overdose are cold and sweaty skin, confusion, shaking, extreme sleepiness, trouble breathing, and coma.

Death

Many people die from pain medicine overdoses. In fact, more people overdose from pain medicines every year than from heroin and cocaine combined.

Other Drugs of Abuse

There are many other drugs of abuse, including:

Ecstasy (X, E, XTC) is a pill that is often taken at parties and clubs. It is sometimes called the "love drug" because it makes people feel very friendly and touchy. It also raises body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure, and can make you feel sad for days after its effects wear off. Click here for more [information about ecstasy.](#)

K2 or Spice (fake weed, Skunk) is a drug made from shredded dried plant materials and chemicals. It is usually smoked. The "high" feels about the same as the "high" from marijuana. Spice users sometimes end up in the emergency room with rapid heart rates, vomiting and other uncomfortable side effects. K2/Spice is illegal. Click here for more [information about K2/Spice.](#)

LSD (acid) comes in pills or on small pieces of paper that have been soaked in liquid LSD. It makes you see, hear, and feel things that aren't there. You might see bright colors, pretty pictures, or things that scare you. Click here for more [information about LSD.](#)

PCP (angel dust) is a pill or powder that can be eaten, smoked, or snorted up the nose. It makes people feel far away from the world around them. PCP often makes people feel angry and violent, not happy and dreamy. Click here for more [information about PCP.](#)

Inhalants are dangerous chemicals that make you feel high when you breathe them into your lungs (also called huffing or sniffing). These chemicals are found in household cleaners, spray cans, glue, and even permanent markers. Inhalants can make you pass out, stop your heart and your breathing, and kill you. Click here for more [information about inhalants.](#)

Club Drugs

Some drugs are called "club drugs" because they are sometimes passed

around at nightclubs and parties.

GHB is a liquid or powder that can make you pass out. It's called a "date rape" drug because someone can secretly put it in your drink. This means that you can't fight back or defend yourself. Then they will have sex with you without your permission.

Rohypnol (roofies) is a date rape pill and can also be put in a drink. **Ketamine** (K, Special K) makes you feel far away from what's going on around you and can feel scary and unpleasant. It is usually taken by mouth, snorted up the nose, or injected with a needle. Click here for more [information about these drugs](#).

Bath Salts are drugs made with chemicals like the "upper" found in the Khat plant. They are only sold with the name "Bath Salts" to make them look harmless. These drugs can make you "high" but they can also make you shaky, afraid, and violent. They look like a white or brown shiny powder and are sold in small packages labeled "not for human consumption." They can be taken by mouth, by inhaling into the lungs, or with a needle. Some people end up in the emergency room or even die after taking bath salts. Click here for more [information about bath salts](#).